

OPENING STATEMENT FOR GREG WALDEN

COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE LEGISLATIVE HEARING ON HR 4200 DECEMBER 7, 2005

Thank you Chairman Goodlatte; as you know I introduced The Forest Emergency Recovery and Research Act (HR 4200) with you, Representatives Brian Baird, Stephanie Herseth and others following nearly two years of work and seven hearings directed at identifying obstacles to forest recovery following catastrophic events such as massive wildfires, blow-downs and ice storms. The bill now has nearly 150 cosponsors.

The goal of our bill is to expedite forest rehabilitation without reducing environmental standards. Today, the process required of our federal land managers forces them to be the slowest in the country in response to catastrophic forest events. In fact, we've seen that State and Tribal forest managers consistently respond to disasters in less than half the time it takes Federal land managers. The overwhelming results on State and Tribal lands are faster and more successful reforestation efforts. Whereas, on our national forests, the Government Accountability Office reported to us that the backlog of reforestation needs is at least a million acres.

The Forest Emergency Recovery and Research Act is narrowly written to focus on the removal of dead and dying trees where appropriate, to encourage quicker replanting and habitat restoration using native plants, and provide comprehensive research on the best protocols for future recovery efforts. By every standard, this is the most comprehensive forest research bill introduced in decades.

People in my state of Oregon don't accept the notion that it should take three years to remove a burned dead tree after a fire. And yet, all too often that's what happens. Currently, in Oregon, only about 5% of burned federal lands receive any restoration treatments. This is particularly disturbing given that approximately 12 million acres in my state are at high risk for catastrophic fire. A recent statewide survey found nearly 75% of Oregonians support use of the wood while it has value and restoration of the forests quicker than occurs today. Put simply, most Oregonians like to see their national forests forested.

Before I explain what our bill does, let me talk about what it does not do. For weeks, groups who had never seen or read the measure we introduced were attacking it with outrageous and untruthful claims. Even after some were specifically told that their claims were not accurate, they continued to mislead the public and their special interest group supporters.

So here's what the bill does NOT do:

It does not apply to wilderness areas, national parks or national monuments.

It does not “reward arson.” Arson is a class E felony punishable by up to five years in prison, hundreds of thousands of dollars in fines and possible restitution for the lost timber and fire suppression costs.

It does not require “plantation forests.” In fact the bill specifically prohibits “plantation forests” and directs that reforestation efforts use native species to create a natural forest or habitat.

It does not override environmental laws such as the Clean Water Act, the Endangered Species Act, etc.

It does not override the underlying forest management plans. Whatever is in the very comprehensive management plans, including limitations on harvest areas, preservation of stream setbacks, habitat areas, etc. will continue to govern recovery efforts.

It does not apply its expedited provisions to green timber sales. This is not the “salvage rider.” The expedited provisions apply to dead and dying trees after a catastrophic event where agencies can justify the need for emergency action.

It does not eliminate roadless areas. Any temporary roads built as a part of approved projects must be reclaimed and reforested as a part of those projects. In other words, roadless areas stay roadless.

It does not overturn any court decisions or injunctions.

It will not be rammed through a committee with no hearing. It will not be marked up after today’s hearing, as has been claimed.

It is not a clearcutting bill, and in fact does not require or even specify tree removal as a part of restoration work. It merely allows the agencies to implement **any** needed recovery activities that meet the emergency criteria listed in the bill---so that desired forest conditions can be achieved in a timely manner.

What HR 4200 does do is to require Forest Service and BLM forest professionals to review and analyze damage from catastrophic events, develop recovery projects utilizing interdisciplinary teams and public participation, apply the best available science, while providing for administrative appeals and full legal recourse. And in every instance, the focus of this bill is directly and unambiguously on forest recovery, in accordance with locally developed forest plans. The legal standard and burden of proof established in this bill requires the agencies to justify their actions in terms of forest recovery.

Make no mistake; those opposing this bill are the same ones that opposed passage of the successful and bipartisan Healthy Forests Restoration Act. Do you remember what they said about HFRA?

The American Lands Alliance: It’s “nothing more than a thinly veiled plan to increase logging.”

The Wilderness Society: “The bill’s main purpose is to undo environmental law.”

The Sierra Club: “Congress managed to take a terrible policy and turn it into an even worse bill.”

Now these groups are using the same rhetoric against HR 4200---they **were** wrong on the Healthy Forests Restoration Act and they **are** wrong on the Forest Emergency Recovery and Research Act.

My colleague, Brian Baird from Washington, talks eloquently of the intelligence of using wood from dead trees rather than from live trees, and harvesting them in this country rather than from poorer nations whose forests are more fragile and whose environmental controls are virtually nonexistent. I would also add another tradeoff, that if we don’t use wood products, we use substitutes such as plastic, concrete, steel or aluminum that are not only nonrenewable but consume, on average, seven times the amount of energy to produce than for comparable wood products---thus adding increased amounts of green house gases to the atmosphere. In addition, vigorous young forests absorb significant amounts of CO₂ as they grow. HR 4200 allows us to address these environmental issues head-on in a thoughtful and proactive manner.

In this year when we celebrate the 100th anniversary of the creation of our great forest reserves, it is incumbent upon us to protect our national treasures for the future, by managing them intelligently today.

As an old Eagle Scout, I still hear the words of my scoutmaster who would tell us kids to “leave your campsite better than you found it.” That’s what we did with passage two years ago of the Healthy Forest Restoration Act, and that’s what we will continue to do with passage of the Forest Emergency Recovery and Research Act. We will leave our forests in better condition than we found them, treading lightly on the land, protecting water quality and enhancing habitat, while using the fiber from dead trees while it still has value.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing. I look forward to working with you and the other members of your Committee on moving and passing this important legislation.